

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BELIZE 545

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PBOR, PINT, BH, UK, GT

SUBJECT: VISIT OF MR. STEPHENS

REF: A) BELIZE 523; B) LONDON 8624

1. INITIAL REPORTS ON STEPHENS VISIT SHOW IT TO HAVE LASTED FOR PERHAPS 5 DAYS DURING WHICH TIME, HE SEEMS TO HAVE COVERED A LOT OF GROUND. AS BEST WE CAN ASCERTAIN, HE WAS GUIDED ABOUT BY GOV. MCENTEE AT ALL TIMES. HE VISITED PUNTA GORDA, IN FAR SOUTH AND OF COURSE, ON EDGE OF CONTROVERSIAL AREA AND AS WELL WENT TO ORANGE WALK/COROZAL AREA IN NORTH. IT APPEARS HE MET WITH FAIRLY LARGE CROSS SECTION OF INFLUENTIAL BELIZEANS. FROM ALL ACCOUNTS, HE DID A LOT OF ASKING AND A LOT OF LISTENING AND VERY LITTLE TALKING. OUR SOURCES HERE SAY HE WAS A VERY SHARP PERSON WHO WENT RIGHT TO THE ISSUES. HE APPEARS TO MADE A GOOD IMPRESSION.

2. SIR SANDY HUNTER, SPEAKER OF HOUSE AND LONG TIME PUP STALWART TALKED TO E/C OFFICER WALSH AND MYSELF AT SOME LENGTH DURING VISIT TO CONSULATE GENERAL FRIDAY AFTERNOON. HUNTSR (PLEASE PROTECT CAREFULLY) TOLD US THAT HE WAS ONE OF GROUP
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FROM BELIZE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE THAT MET WITH STEPHENS ON SATURDAY LAST. GENERAL ATMOSPHERE, EXCEPT FOR HUNTER AND DEREK COURTNEY, LAWYER SON OF SIR HARRISON COURTNEY, ANOTHER OLD, OLD TIMER IN BELIZE POLITICS, WAS THAT BELIZE WAS ESSENTIALLY NOT YET READY FOR INDEPENDENCE. HUNTER CHARACTERIZED OTHERS IN GROUP AS CHILDISH IN THEIR PRESENTATION STRESSING PAROCHIAL VIEW OF PURELY BUSINESSMEN.

3. HARRY LAWRENCE, UDP MEMBER AND EDITOR OF BASICALLY NEUTRAL BELIZE REPORTER AND MAN WHO APPEARS TO HAVE SOBER AND SANE JUDGEMENTS HAD ABOUT THE SAME ASSESSMENT OF C OF C MEETING, ALTHOUGH WE GOT IMPRESSION FROM HIM THAT PRESENTATIONS WERE NOT AS SUPERFICIAL AS HUNTER STATED. HE SUPPORTED HUNTER'S CLAIM-AND THAT OF OTHERS-OF STEPHENS COMPETENCE AND ADDED THAT THE VISITOR TOOK A PRETTY HARD LINE IN DEALING WITH BELIZEANS.

4. PAROCHIAL OR NOT, THE BUSINESSMEN PRESENT INCLUDED ISMAIL GOMEZ, THE FIRST BELIZEAN EVER TO MAKE A MILLION DOLLARS LOCALLY AND INDEPENDENT SENATOR AND SANTOS DIAS PRESIDENT OF CHAMBER OF COMMERCE. THESE MEN ARE INFLUENTIAL AND REPRESENT THE ECONOMIC ELITE HERE. THEIR OPINIONS ARE IMPORTANT.

5. JOHNNY WOODS CHAIRMAN OF THE PUBLIC SERVICES COMMISSION WAS ALSO AT SATURDAY MEETING, PRIMARILY, HE SAID, BECAUSE GOVERNMENT DIDN'T KNOW WHERE ELSE TO PUT HIM. WOODS, ACCORDING TO BOTH HUNTER AND LAWRENCE, WAS ALSO ONE WHO HELD OUT STRONGLY FOR INDEPENDENCE SOONER RATHER THAN LATER. IN CONVERSATION WITH ME AT RECEPTION FOR NEW CARE DIRECTOR, WOODS CONFIRMED STEPHENS TOUGH, PRAGMATIC ATTITUDE. HE SAID IT WAS QUITE CLEAR TO HIM THAT STEPHENS FAVORED SOME SORT OF LAND SETTLEMENT ALTHOUGH HE DID NOT SAY SO OUTRIGHT. WOODS ALSO SAID SEVERAL OF THOSE PRESENT SUGGESTED U.S. SHOULD BE TAKING A LARGER ROLE
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IN THIS MATTER (AN OPINION QUITE WIDELY HELD HERE). WHEN I ASKED WHAT MR. STEPHENS SUGGESTED US POLICY SHOULD BE, WOODS LAUGHED AND SAID, "HE WAFFLED." THERE WERE QUESTIONS PUT TO STEPHENS AS TO HOW LONG UK COULD CARRY ON WITH PRESENT POLICY. STEPHENS PREPOTEDLY TOLD GROUP HE NOT CAREER MAN AND SO COULD NOT SPEAK WITH AUTHORITY FOR GOVERNMENT; HE WAS ONLY AN ADVISOR TO OWENS. HOWEVER, HE IS SAID TO HAVE ADDED HE DID NOT BELIEVE EITHER LABOR OR CONSERVATIVES WOULD LIKELY CONSIDER ANYTHING MUCH LONGER THAN TWO YEARS.

6. UNFORTUNATELY, WE HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TOUCH BASE WITH THOSE OF MORE STRICTLY POLITICAL CAMP. MINENERGY LOUIS SYLVESTRE AT LUNCHEON ON THURSDAY WAS NON-COMMITTAL EXCEPT TO SAY THAT STEPHENS HAD BEEN VERY IMPRESSIVE AND WAS OWENS' CLOSEST ADVISOR ON LATIN AFFAIRS WHOSE OPINION WOULD CARRY CONSIDERABLE WEIGHT.

7. STEPHENS SEEMS TO HAVE MADE A GOOD IMPRESSION HERE BECAUSE OF HIS ABILITY AND FORTHRIGHT ATTITUDE. IT WOULD BE INTERESTING TO KNOW IF THE FESTINA LENTE ATTITUDE OF THE BUSINESSMEN CAME AS ANY SURPRISE TO HIM AND GOVERNOR MCENTEE. THE LATTER AT VARIOUS TIMES HAS CERTAINLY AGREED WITH MY INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

THAT INDEPENDENCE NOW DOES NOT RPT NOT SEEM TO BE UNIVERSAL AND
POPULAR RALLYING CRY AS PRICE WOULD HAVE ONE BELIEVE;
WE ALSO WONDER IF CONCEPT OF LAND SETTLEMENT, BORDER RECTIFICATION
OR WHATEVER ONE WISHES TO CALL IT, GAINED ANY WIDER ACCEPTANCE.
IT IS PERHAPS A HISTORICAL FOOTNOTE THAT SIR SANDY OBSERVED
THAT PERHAPS FIVE OR SIX YEARS AGO, SUCH A SETTLEMENT COULD
HAVE BEEN PROPOSED AND ACCEPTED.
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